

# ABSTRACT

## SOCIAL WORK

BROWN, SHARON D.

B.S.W. BENEDICT COLLEGE, 1992

### A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH AS A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR ADOLESCENTS

Advisor: Professor Naomi T. Ward

Thesis dated May, 1995

This was a descriptive study that examined the attitudes adolescents have toward support systems. The study emphasized support groups as a source of support for adolescents. The purpose of the study was to examine the support systems in the African American church. The study population consisted of 76 adolescents in the Columbia Conference District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Findings concluded that in some categories of support systems some of the responses were negative, while in the majority of the categories the respondents had an overall positive attitude toward the church.

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A DESCRIPTIVE  
STUDY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH AS  
A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR ADOLESCENTS

A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY  
SHARON D. BROWN

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

African American adolescents are faced with tremendous challenges in today's society. In this day of drug abuse, crime, poverty, and gang violence, adolescents have more difficult obstacles than children in the past. In the United States in 1983 there were 8.4 million black youth in the ten to twenty-four year old range, with nearly three million in the 15-19 year old range. The median age for blacks is 25.8 years and 31.8 for whites.<sup>1</sup> This shows that the African American population is a youthful population as compared to whites, therefore causing them to be more deeply affected by social and economic problems that directly affect teenagers and young adults. Federal government sources indicate that black youth in the 15-24 year-old reveal (compared to the 1960s) more black youths are unemployed, in the juvenile justice system, involved in substance abuse, having babies out of wedlock, and committing suicide as compared to twenty-five years ago.<sup>2</sup>

According to 1990 census in South Carolina, there are 47,849 African American male adolescents and 47,554 female adolescents. The total number of African American adolescents is 95,403.<sup>3</sup>

Literature cites evidence that adolescents in South Carolina are faced with many

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<sup>1</sup>Augustus Rodgers, Ph.D., The Black Family: Black Males Overcoming Life-Threatening Obstacles. In Conference Proceedings of The National Black Family Summit 1992 (SC: The University of South Carolina College of Social Work, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>Reginald L. Jones, ed., Black Adolescents (CA: Cobb & Henry Publishers, 1989).

<sup>3</sup>S.C. Budget & Control Board, Office of Research & Statistical Services, Sex By Age and Employment Status.

issues.

Forty-six percent of teenage mothers will receive welfare within four years.

Alcohol and drug abuse is another problem prevalent among adolescents. In 1993, 66,393 high school youths consumed alcohol regularly. In 1993, 22,505 juvenile cases were processed through South Carolina's Department of Juvenile Justice. This number is a 20% increase since 1989.

In South Carolina, thirty-two adolescents become pregnant every day. Of the 2,690 girls ages 13-19 who gave birth in 1993, 149 had two or more previous pregnancies. Studies show that 85% of males have had sexual intercourse by age 20, and 75% of females have had sexual intercourse by age 20. In Columbia, South Carolina, there are an estimated 939 adolescents a year who become pregnant. Teenage pregnancy, according to statistics, appears to be one of the major adolescent problems in Columbia and other parts of South Carolina. To combat the problems of teenage pregnancy, South Carolina has a council on adolescent pregnancy prevention.<sup>4</sup>

It seems that adolescents need a strong support system if they are to survive in this society. Many adolescents do not benefit from a family support system. Some families have not been the avenue by which adolescents gain support. Some families lack interest in the lives of their children. Adolescents are allowed to distribute drugs, participate in gangs, and drop out of school. In every case, parents may not be responsible for these practices taking place. Some adolescents decide for themselves to live their lives as they

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<sup>4</sup>S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, S.C. Council on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention.

choose. Despite their willingness to help and their concern, parents may or may not be able to influence their teens.

Many institutions and strategies have been established to assist families. For centuries many African American families have obtained support from the church. The African American church has been an institution that has enhanced the lives of African Americans during slavery.<sup>5</sup> The African American church was established as a response to the needs of slaves. For example, the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church was established by Richard Allen to support the growing needs and issues of African Americans.<sup>6</sup> The church ministered and provided support to the total person. History provides evidence that the church has been an institution that has been most influential in the African American family.

The function of the church is not only to develop spirituality among its members, but to also promote positive value systems and the social transformation of its members.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, the challenges today are different and are of greater magnitude than problems in the past. However, the church is still a guiding force in addressing issues of today. Due to growing problems that families and children are facing, the church is adjusting and preparing to meet the diverse needs of its people.<sup>8</sup> For example, the Antioch Baptist

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<sup>5</sup>Augustus Rodgers, Ph.D., The Black Family: Black Males Overcoming Life-Threatening Obstacles. In Conference Proceedings of The National Black Family Summit 1992 (SC: The University of South Carolina College of Social Work, 1992).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

Church in Atlanta, Georgia serves as a support system for members and the community.<sup>9</sup> The Antioch Baptist Church originally planned to build their new church in the suburbs of Atlanta, but decided to remain in the community where they are greatly needed the most. The church has expressed an interest in the young males in the inner city community. Robert M. Franklin, director of Black Church studies at Emory University School of Theology, states that a generation ago, 80 percent of inner city males had some contact with church or Sunday school. Among the current generation, it is estimated that 60% of young black males have no contact with Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

Even the popular literature cites the African American church as a support system. Project Spirit is an after-school tutorial program that was piloted in fifteen churches in Oakland, Indianapolis, and Atlanta. Project Spirit stresses Strength, Perseverance, Imagination, Responsibility, Integrity, and Talent. This program offers structured activities, tutorials, and a safe environment for those children whose parents work late. The program was launched after reviewing national statistics in 1982 that showed of 100 first-grade black students, only 72 become high school graduates, and from that number, twenty-nine went to college. Of the 29 college students, twelve graduated and only eight completed graduate or professional school.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>"Young Black Men and Church," Christian Century (April 27, 1994): 439-440.

<sup>10</sup>Augustus Rodgers, Ph.D., The Black Family: Black Males Overcoming Life-Threatening Obstacles. In Conference Proceedings of The National Black Family Summit 1992 (SC: The University of South Carolina College of Social Work, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>Alex Poinsett, "Suffer the Little Children...", EBONY (August 1988): 144-148.



### Statement of the Problem

Due to the tremendous challenges facing the youths of today, it is necessary they have a strong and stable support system. African American families are the primary support system for adolescents. Adolescents need a support system that they can rely on to help ensure them a more positive future. If the family is not stable enough to meet the challenges of today's youth, the church, like before, might take this responsibility. The adolescents are faced with problems that they are unable to handle themselves. The problem is, are there support systems available that are addressing the needs of adolescents? Is the church a significant support system for adolescents, and how helpful are the churches' support system in addressing the needs of adolescents?

The problem is whether the support systems available in the African American church are addressing the problems or needs adolescents may have.

### Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine what support systems are in the African American church, and the attitudes adolescents have toward these support systems. This study will also determine if the African American church can be an effective support system in the lives of youths. As a result of obtaining the attitudes adolescents have toward support systems, this study may help the types of programs that are developed in the Black Church. The study will also determine if more support systems are needed, and the effectiveness of the current support systems.

The significance of this study to social work is that it will provide another resource to social work profession in assisting adolescents. The church may not be well-known as

a use of support for adolescents in the social work profession. The practice of social work may be able to incorporate the church as a vital part of treating and helping adolescents. Just as many other resources are used in assisting adolescents, the church may also be considered in an effort to enhance the lives of adolescents.

This study will hopefully promote future research in the African American church and how it is beneficial to social work.

The researcher would like to work with churches in getting them involved with social service agencies. If they do not have any support systems, the researcher would like to assist churches in establishing support systems for adolescents in their church. The researcher is interested in knowing how adolescents feel that they benefit from the church. The church has tried to address issues facing today's youth. The researcher would like to know what churches are doing to support their adolescents.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The terms Black Church and African American church will be used synonymously throughout the literature. African American and Black Churches are one in which a majority of its members and its leadership is black. The Black Church has been a strong force in the African American community since slavery. There are many reasons the church is capable of functioning as a support system. The Black Church, as an institution, has always reached out to serve important functions for the black community as a whole.<sup>12</sup> It is a preserver of the African American heritage and an agent for reform.<sup>13</sup>

Over time, the church has become the strongest institution in the community. Community service programs have always been a part of the African American church. Over two-hundred years ago Absalom Jones and Richard Allen separated from the white Methodist church in Philadelphia to form the Free African Society with forty-two members.<sup>14</sup> Initially, the Free African Society was not established as a church. It was established for socioeconomic reasons such as savings, mutual aid, and education. It was not until three years later that Richard Allen formed Mother Bethel, the first African

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<sup>12</sup>Andrew Billingsley, Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Augustus Rodgers, Ph.D., The Black Family: Black Males Overcoming Life-Threatening Obstacles. In Conference Proceedings of The National Black Family Summit 1992 (SC: The University of South Carolina College of Social Work, 1992).

Methodist-Episcopal Church in America.<sup>15</sup>

Billingsley study showed the size, types of conventions, contemporary purposes, and types of programs in the church. Studies show that there are over 75,000 Black Churches in the nation. The majority of these churches are Protestant. The National Baptist Convention, United States of America, National Baptist Convention of America, and National Primitive Baptist Convention are the three largest groups of churches among Black Churches in the nation. The African-Methodist-Episcopal church has the next largest sect of members.

The African American church is no longer an institution for religious purposes only. The church is adjusting to meet the growing needs and problems of African American adolescents and their families. The African American church represents freedom, independence, leadership, self-esteem, self-development, and relaxation.

Black Churches in the Northeastern region of the United States serve as examples of how churches have established social service institutions for families and the community.<sup>16</sup> Seven out of ten churches have established community outreach programs. These activities include programs for adolescents, adults, families and the elderly.

#### Population Affected

The Black Church functions as a support system for the total community. Children and adolescents can benefit from this strong support system. There are approximately 2.5

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<sup>15</sup>Andrew Billingsley, Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

million black adolescents between the ages of ten and fourteen. This group is projected to expand to 3.2 million by the year 2000.<sup>17</sup> The majority of these children have working mothers. When mothers are working, children are being left home alone after school. There is a need for after-school programs that will assist working mothers in providing care for their children.

Adolescents may experience difficulty while progressing through these stages. The Black Church must be able to assist parents with any difficulties they may encounter while their children are going through the adolescent phase.

#### Related Research

Few studies have been done relating to the African American church as a support system for adolescents.

The related research will address how the Black Church is an active role in the lives of African American adolescents. The study, *The Role of the Black Church in Working with Black Adolescents*, examines churches in the Northeastern region of the United States and their participation in the lives of African-American adolescents. The purpose of the study was to examine the support systems available in the African-American church. Another study, *Church Attendance, Meaningfulness of Religion, and Depressive Symptomatology Among Adolescents*, indicated that adolescents who attended church regularly were likely to have low scores on the Beck Depression Inventory. This study was completed by 451 adolescents at a public high school in Texas. The Beck Depression Inventory was used to determine the participants' gender, frequency of church

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

attendance, and meaningfulness of religion in their lives.

The third study, *The Church, the Family and the School in the African American Community*, related the Black Church to being a support system for the family and the school. This study uses a holistic perspective, recognizing how the church, school, and the family operate within the domain of the larger society as socializing agents and are shaped by their own historical foundations.<sup>18</sup> A representative sample of 315 Black Churches in the Northeastern region of the country was used. The study utilizes the school, the church, and family interchangeably. The church can be beneficial if used effectively in the school and family. The Black Churches indicated in the study utilize the schools established by their congregation. These examples exemplify how in the past African Americans took responsibility for educating their own. Some findings concluded that the church provided strong support for adolescents at all levels. The majority of the rural churches provided support for black colleges either through special offerings or annual contributions.

The findings also concluded that 79% of the churches reported they had participated in outreach programs or sponsored their own community outreach programs. Eight percent of the churches had participated in government programs.

The Black Church family project was a study conducted by Andrew Billingsley and Cleopatra Caldwell. This study surveyed six hundred thirty-five northern Black Churches. The project focused on community outreach programs established in the community by the

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<sup>18</sup>Andrew Billingsley and Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," Journal of Negro Education 60.3 (1991): 431-439.

African American churches. The study also directed attention to those programs that were identified for adolescents. This study examined the many problems facing adolescents today. Some of those problems included adolescent pregnancy, out-of-wedlock births, which sometimes result in poverty. As a result of premature sexual activity, adolescents have greater risk of sexually transmitted disease. This is due to their lack of knowledge as it relates to safe sex practices.

Billingsley & Caldwell indicated that the African American church is the primary institutional foundation of the black community.<sup>19</sup> The Black Church Family Project surveyed 635 Northern churches; 320 were in North Central, and 315 in Northeastern United States. The survey was administered to these churches to establish the existence of support systems in the African American church. The churches listed in this study were compiled through use of denominational list, ministerial alliances, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Findings of this study indicated that of the 635 churches surveyed, 176 churches reported having some type of youth program established in their church. The most popular program reported by the churches was the teen group. These programs consisted of Christian fellowship, counseling, group, and rap sessions. Sports activities followed as being the second most offered activity in the church. The least common programs were AIDS support and youth health-related programs. Most churches that were older and well-established were more likely to have youth programs than the relatively new churches. The African Methodist churches were found to have more youth programs than

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

any other denomination. The study also determined that among congregations of mostly middle-class, 47% had a greater chance of adolescent support systems in the church as opposed to the working class, with 17%.<sup>20</sup> The size of the congregation also had a determining factor in the amounts of support systems. The larger the church, the greater likelihood of youth programs. Among large churches with memberships of 401 or more, 48% had youth programs. Those with 176-400 members, 38% had youth programs.

The results of this study indicated that some issues facing African American youth are not being addressed.

*Church Attendance, Meaningfulness of Religion, and Depressive Symptomatology Among Adolescents* was a study conducted in Texas in 1989. This study was not related to adolescents and the church; however, it did examine the meaningfulness of religion to adolescents and how it affects some of their behaviors. This study examined adolescent depression and suicide and the meaningfulness of religion in their lives.

Jessor, in 1977, reported that "adolescent religiosity provided a personal control against problem behavior." The study also indicated among adolescents ages 15-29 years there were less incidents of suicide, therefore supporting the notion that frequent church attendance is beneficial. A decline in church attendance resulted in more suicide rates among this age group.

In this study, 451 high school students were administered the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). The study listed items to determine participant's gender, frequency of church attendance, and meaningfulness of one's religion.

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.



In two of the studies, the churches were utilized to meet the growing needs of adolescents. Many of the churches offered support groups, counseling, tutorials, and sports activities. In both studies, at least all churches had two or more adolescent programs. Both studies saw the church as being the solid foundation for the family and schools. The church can be a useful tool when utilized with assisting adolescents and their families.

The third study was also similar to the other studies indicated. This study evaluated the meaningfulness of religion in the lives of 451 adolescents in a public high school in Texas. This study did not survey African American churches, nor did it survey African American adolescents. However, the study did come to the conclusion that those adolescents who found religion to be meaningful were less likely to commit suicide and have depression.

### Theoretical Approach

Social systems theory and support systems are the primary approaches utilized in this study. The church as a support system is further reflected in Logan, Freeman, and McRoy.<sup>21</sup> The support systems are referred to as natural support systems because they are resources the individual has contact with daily. Boyd-Franklin states the organized church is by far the most profound instrument available to blacks when it comes to coping with

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<sup>21</sup>Sady M. L. Logan, Edith M. Freeman, and Rugh G. McRoy, Social Work Practice with Black Families A Culturally Specific Perspective, (NY: Longman Publishing Co., 1990).

the multiplicity of problems that beset their lives.<sup>22</sup> Churches and its leaders can provide support and guidance for its members through support systems.

Parishes and congregations are natural ecological structures and as such may offer many resources needed by adolescents. Such resources provide spiritual stimulating social activities, recreational programs, and peer group support.<sup>23</sup>

A social system is a defined structure of interacting and interdependent persons that have the capacity for organized activity.<sup>24</sup> Systems theory offers a way of thinking in an organized, integrated way about the interaction of its members. A system is an organization of objects united in some form of regular interaction or interdependence.<sup>25</sup> The components of a system interact and influence one another.

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<sup>22</sup>Nancy Boyd Franklin, Black Families in Therapy (NY: The Guilford Press, 1989).

<sup>23</sup>Andrew Billingsley and Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," Journal of Negro Education 60.3 (1991): 431-439.

<sup>24</sup>Robert R. Greene and Paul H. Ephross, Human Behavior Theory and Social Work Practice (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

### Definition of Terms:

Adolescents: A person growing up from manhood or womanhood between the ages of twelve and twenty.

Support Systems: Programs or groups established to assist adolescents.

Black or African American Church: One in which a majority of its members are black and its leadership (i.e., senior minister) is also black.

African Americans: African Americans of African descent living in the United States of America.

Social System: A structure of interacting and interdependent persons that has the capacity for organized activity.

African Method Episcopal Church: African American church organization established by Richard Allen during slavery.

### Statement of Research Questions

What are the attitudes of African Americans about support systems in their church?

Do adolescents feel support systems in the African American church help them?

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

##### Research Design

The type of design utilized in this research was a descriptive design. This design described how the research was explained through use of a frequency distribution.

##### Site and Setting

This study was conducted in Columbia, South Carolina, which is a southern city. South Carolina has a population of 3,486,703<sup>26</sup>. The population of African Americans in South Carolina is 1,039,884, of which 95,403 are between the ages of five and seventeen.<sup>27</sup> There are ninety-eight African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches in the Columbia Conference District in the state of South Carolina. The ninety-eight churches have a Young People Department (YPD) for adolescents in the ninety-eight churches.

The setting in which the study was conducted was the Columbia Conference Meeting of the Young People's Department which convened at Turner Memorial AME Church in Columbia, South Carolina, March 18, 1995. Permission to conduct the study was given by Geraldine Robinson, president of the Columbia Conference District.

##### Sampling

The type of sample used in this research was convenience sampling. Fourteen hundred adolescents are members of the Young People Department in the Columbia

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<sup>26</sup>S.C. State Budget & Control Board, Office of Research and Statistical Services, South Carolina Statistical Abstract.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

Conference District. Eighty, between the ages of 12-19, attended the Columbia Conference Meeting and were invited to voluntarily participate in the study. Seventy-six agreed to participate in the study. The population was between the ages of twelve and nineteen years old. Thirty-nine males and thirty-seven females, for a total of seventy-six adolescents comprised the sample population.

### Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was a twenty-five item questionnaire developed by the researcher based on review of attitudinal scales in Social Work and Research Evaluation.<sup>28</sup> The instrument was pretested for validity and reliability by reviewing the questionnaire with an adolescent similar in age as the sample population.

The instrument, Attitudes of Youth Toward Youth Services, consisted of four sections: demographics, level of participation, types of programs, and attitudes toward church and church programs. Section one contained demographics, age gender, and who the adolescents lived with. Section two described the level of participation, and how often parents and the adolescents attend church. Other data included the amount of parent and adolescent participation in church-related activities. Section three described the types of programs adolescents participated in at their church.

### Data Collection

The Attitudes Toward Youth Services was a self-administered questionnaire at the Columbia Conference Meeting of the Young People Department, Turner Memorial

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<sup>28</sup>Richard M. Grinnell, Social Work Research and Evaluation (IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1988).

African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The researcher administered the questionnaire to all adolescents during the opening session of the Columbia Conference Meeting. The researcher explained the questionnaire and provided a sample question for the participants to ask general questions before they began responding to the questions. The researcher was also available to the participants to answer individual questions.

#### Data Analysis

The data was analyzed with the use of a frequency distribution. Frequency distribution displayed the amount of times an answer occurred. In each frequency distribution, the participants expressed their attitudes and the data was analyzed by frequency distribution based on their responses.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The results in this chapter will be presented in four sections. The sections are: (1) demographics, (2) level of participation, (3) attitude toward church and church programs, (4) types of programs, preference for programs, and additions. This presentation represents grouping of questions by sections. Thus, in many instances the question number will not correspond to the table number.

#### Demographics

TABLE 1  
Age

N = 76		
Age	Frequency	%
12-13	14	18.42
14-15	29	38.16
16-17	22	28.95
18-19	11	14.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Table one shows that 14 or 18.42 of the respondents were in the age range of 12-13; 29 or 38.16 were 14-15; 22 of 28.95 were 16-17, while 11 or 14.47 were 18-19.

The majority respondents were between the ages of 14-15 (38.16).

**TABLE 2**  
**Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Males</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>51.31</b>
<b>Females</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>48.69</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

There were seventy-six participants, 39 (51.31) were male; while thirty-seven (48.69) were female.

**TABLE 3**  
**Residence**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Both parents</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>72.37</b>
<b>Mother only</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17.10</b>
<b>Father only</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5.26</b>
<b>G. P.</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.63</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.63</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>99.99</b>

Table 3 reveals that 55 (72.37) respondents lived with both parents; 13 (17.10) lived with mother only; 4 adolescents (5.26) resided with father only; 2 or 2.63 of the respondents lived with grandparents or others. The majority of the adolescents live with their parents. Of the seventy-six adolescents in the study, 55 (72.37) lived with both parents.



Level of Participation

Level of participation was determined for parents/guardians and respondents.

**TABLE 4**  
**Parents/Guardian Church Attendance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 3 times	5	6.58
3-6 times	11	14.47
7-10 times	6	7.89
More than 10 times	54	71.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Five (6.58) respondents' parents or guardians attended church services less than three times in the last three months; 11 (14.47) attended church 3-6 times; 6 (7.89) respondents stated that their parents or guardians attended church 7-10 times; 54 (71.06) respondents said their parents or guardians attended church more than 10 times in the last three months.

**TABLE 5**  
**Parent or Guardian Church Activity Attendance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 3 times	4	6.26
3-6 times	20	26.32
7-10 times	12	15.79
More than 10 times	38	50.00
No response	2	2.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

The table depicted the amount of times parents or guardians participated in church-related activities. Four (6.26) respondents stated their parents or guardians attended church-related activities less than three times; 20 (26.32) stated 3-6 times; 12 (15.79) stated 7-10 times; 38 (50.00) said more than 10 times. Two (2.63) of the respondents had no response.

**TABLE 6**  
**Respondents' Church Activity Attendance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 3 times	16	21.05
3-6 times	29	38.16
7-10 times	12	15.79
More than 10 times	19	25.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Sixteen (21.05) respondents said they attended church-related activities less than three times; twenty-nine (38.16) stated they attended church-related activities; twelve (15.79) replied seven to ten times; and 19 (25.00) said more than 10 times.

**TABLE 7**  
**Respondents Worship Service Attendance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 3 times	8	10.52
3-6 times	18	23.69
7-10 times	14	18.42
More than 10 times	36	47.37
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Eight (10.52) of the respondents said they attended worship services less than three times; 18 (23.69) stated 3-6 times; 14 (18.42) said 7-10 times; 36 (47.37) said more than 10 times.

These tables display attitudes respondents had toward their church helping them deal with peer pressure.

**TABLE 8**  
**Programs and Peer Pressure**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Positive	5	6.58
Somewhat Positive	11	14.47
Negative	60	78.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Five (6.58) respondents felt church programs helped them resist peer pressure; 11 (14.47) were somewhat positive, while 60 (78.95) felt church programs did not help them deal with peer pressure.

**TABLE 9**  
**Resisting Peer Pressure**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Positive	58	76.32
Somewhat Positive	14	18.42
Negative	4	5.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Fifty-eight (76.32) respondents felt that adolescents who attended church were better able to resist peer pressure; 14 (18.42) were somewhat positive, while 4 (5.26) felt that attending church did not help adolescents resist peer pressure.

More than half (76.32) of the respondents felt they did not feel that church programs helped them deal with peer pressure, but did feel that those adolescents who attended church were better able to resist peer pressure.

This table displays the number of respondents' attitudes toward church programs they do not benefit from.

**TABLE 10**  
**Not Benefiting from Church Programs**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Positive</b>	13	17.11
<b>Somewhat Positive</b>	14	18.42
<b>Negative</b>	49	64.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Thirteen (17.11) respondents revealed they do benefit from church programs; 14 (18.42) were somewhat positive about not benefiting from church programs; 49 (64.47) had a negative response toward not benefiting from church programs.

On question 23, the respondents were asked whether they wished they did not attend church.

**TABLE 11**  
**Wish Not to Attend Church**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Positive	4	5.26
Somewhat Positive	7	9.21
Negative	65	85.53
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Four (5.26) adolescents said they wish they did not attend church; 7 (9.21) had a somewhat positive attitude toward not attending church. Sixty-five (85.53) had a negative attitude toward non-church attendance.

**Attitudes Toward Church and Church Programs**

**TABLE 12**  
**Discussing Sex at Church**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Positive	5	6.58
Somewhat Positive	11	14.47
Negative	60	78.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

The responses to question number 18 regarding whether respondents could discuss sex at church are reflected in table 12. Five (6.58) adolescents felt that they could discuss sex at church; 11 (14.47) felt somewhat positive, while 60 (78.95) said they could not discuss sex at church.

Level of comfort discussing personal problems with individuals was elicited in question number 13.

**TABLE 13**  
**Personal Problems**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Positive	37	40.79
Somewhat Positive	26	34.21
Negative	19	25.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Thirty-seven (40.79) adolescents had a positive attitude about discussing personal problems in church; 26 (34.21) had a somewhat positive attitude; 19 (25.00) had a negative attitude.

This table addresses whether the option exists for adolescents to discuss personal concerns.

**TABLE 14**  
**Discussing Personal Concerns at Church**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Positive	10	13.16
Somewhat Positive	9	11.84
Negative	57	75.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 14 reflects the responses to question 10. Ten (13.16) respondents indicated

they had a positive attitude discussing personal concerns at church; 9 (11.84) were somewhat positive; and 57 (75.00) had a negative attitude discussing personal problems. The respondents indicated in Table 14 that thirty-seven (40.79) felt they could discuss problems with a particular individual in the church, while 57 (75.00) felt the option did not exist for them to discuss personal concerns in the church.

The table displays the respondents' attitudes toward solving problems through the church was asked in question 20.

**TABLE 15**  
**Church Programs and Problem Resolution**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Positive</b>	45	59.29
<b>Somewhat Positive</b>	20	26.32
<b>Negative</b>	11	14.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Forty-five (59.29) respondents had a positive attitude toward church programs and problem resolution 20 (26.32) somewhat positive; and 11 (14.47) negative.

Almost half (59.29) the respondents felt church programs helped them solve problems in some way.

**TABLE 16**  
**Parent/Guardian Insistence on Church Attendance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Positive</b>	61	80.26
<b>Somewhat Positive</b>	8	10.53
<b>Negative</b>	7	9.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

The responses to question number 17 shown in Table 16 were 61 (80.26), of the respondents had a positive attitude toward parents' insistence of church attendance; 8 (10.53) were somewhat positive; and 7 (9.21) had a negative response.

The following tables display respondents' attitudes toward church attendance and church activities which were elicited in questions 11, 16, 21 and 23.

**TABLE 17**  
**Regular Attendance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Positive</b>	13	17.11
<b>Somewhat Positive</b>	16	21.05
<b>Negative</b>	47	61.84
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Thirteen (17.11) respondents had a positive attitude concerning regular attendance; 16 (21.05) somewhat positive; 47 (61.84) had a negative attitude toward regular church attendance helps adolescents deal with peer pressure.



**TABLE 18**  
**Voluntary Attendance**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Positive</b>	14	18.42
<b>Somewhat Positive</b>	12	15.79
<b>Negative</b>	50	65.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Fourteen (18.42) respondents attended church voluntarily; 12 (15.79) had a somewhat positive attitude; while 50 (65.79) had a negative attitude toward voluntary attendance to church.

A large portion of the adolescents attended church regularly and had no problem attending church voluntarily or with parents' insistence.

The tables below depict adolescents' attitudes toward church-related activities.

**TABLE 19**  
**Church Activities**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Positive</b>	69	80.26
<b>Somewhat Positive</b>	5	6.58
<b>Negative</b>	10	13.16
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Sixty-nine (80.26) respondents revealed they had a positive attitude toward church activities; 5 (6.58) somewhat positive; and 10 (13.16) had a negative attitude.

**TABLE 20**  
**Church Programs as Terrific**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Positive</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40.79</b>
<b>Somewhat Positive</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>34.21</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25.00</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Thirty-seven (40.79) adolescents indicated they had a positive attitude toward church programs; 26 (34.21) somewhat positive; and 19 (25.00) negative.

**Types of Programs, Program Preferences and Additions**

The types of programs that are in the church are the choir, rap sessions, tutorials, and sports activities. Programs that seemed to have the most participation were the choir, rap sessions and sports activities. Almost all the respondents said they participated in the choir. A church program that was not indicated in the question was gospel singouts. The respondents seemed to include this program as being one of the most popular church activities.

Programs in the church that adolescents wished they could have more of were Young People Department (YPD) meetings and rap sessions. A program that respondents wanted to see added to the church was support groups.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The sample consisted of seventy-six adolescents, thirty-nine males and thirty-seven females. The largest portion of the respondents were between the ages of 14-15 years of age. Data indicated that over half of the respondents lived with both parents. While literature often indicates African American adolescents are from single parent homes, this was not the findings in this research.

More than half the adolescents responded that their parent(s) or guardian(s) attended church more than ten times in the last three months. It was also indicated that almost half the adolescents attend church services more than ten times. It can be noted that when there was a high incidence of parent or guardian attendance, the respondents were more likely to have a high church attendance among adolescents. Half of the respondents said their parent(s) or guardian(s) attended church-related activities more than ten times. The majority of the respondents said they attended church-related activities three to six times. Although less respondents said they attended church-related activities than their parents, it can still be noted that those parents who attended church services and church-related activities were more likely to have adolescents attending the services with them.

Church attendance seemed to be relatively high among the respondents. An overwhelming majority responded negatively when asked whether they wished they did not attend church. Therefore, the data revealed that the adolescents had a positive

attitude toward church attendance.

A large portion of the respondents indicated they could discuss personal problems with an individual in the church; however, they responded negatively when asked did the option exist for them to discuss personal problems. This could indicate that adolescents can discuss personal problems with someone individually, but not feel that the church as a whole provides the opportunity for them to express their personal concerns or problems.

More than half the adolescents had a positive attitude toward their parents' insisting they attend church. Although they had an overall positive attitude toward church attendance, almost half of the respondents felt that regular church attendance did not help them deal with peer pressure. Due to the fact the respondents did not have a problem with regular church attendance, it may be important to note that adolescents like attending church, but find that there are not programs established in the church that help them deal with peer pressure. Church attendance is not a problem; therefore, it may be beneficial to institute some programs that will help adolescents deal with the various issues of peer pressure. Like Billingsley and Caldwell's study, the churches had limited amounts of support groups for the adolescents. Billingsley also noted that social activities, recreational programs and peer group support are programs that are needed in the church. Overall, the adolescents had a positive attitude toward church activities, but many find that the activities are not beneficial in helping adolescents resist peer pressure. While adolescents felt they did not receive help from the church in resisting peer pressure, they did feel that the church helped them solve personal problems through talking with individuals. It may be noted that although the church may not have had a program

established that helped adolescents deal specifically with personal or peer-related problems, the respondents themselves may have found some resolution in the church that help them solve problems. The respondents also felt that they could not discuss sex at church; almost half the adolescents felt they could not discuss sex at church. It is concluded that the respondents may have some difficulty with expressing their personal concerns and problems or the option does not exist for them to discuss these problems.

#### Limitations of the Study

The sample size is not representative of the entire adolescents in the Columbia Conference District. It cannot be assumed that the selected sample participants in this study are representative of all participants in the Young People Department in the Columbia Conference District. The researcher did not compare gender issues in this study. This may be a factor consideration when evaluating the likes and dislikes of church programs. This study was limited to adolescents in the African American Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. It did not include adolescents from other denominations. The sample was taken from those adolescents in the Columbia Conference District; therefore, it did not depict adolescents from all African Methodist Episcopal churches as well as other churches. A broader sample may include adolescents from all denominations to perhaps give an example of the attitudes of adolescents in different churches.

## CHAPTER VI

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The African American church is a support system that may be utilized in social work practice. Support systems are not always found in an agency, but rather in one's own environment. The church is an entity that may be overlooked by the social work field. The church offers support to individuals of all ages. The African American church may be implemented as an aspect of a person's treatment. For example, if an adolescent needed to be involved in activities in his or her community such as tutorials, support groups and rap sessions, the church could be a place to seek assistance.

Another implication in the field of social work may benefit from having a support system for their clientele. Hepworth and Larsen cites evidence that adolescents and individuals in general have less stressors, and are able to cope with everyday life when the church as a support system is evident in their lives. African Americans have a strong history with the church. By having the church as a support system, African American adolescents can identify with an institution that has had a significant part of their lives. Social work could be beneficial in creating more support systems in the church. Adolescents in this study indicated they did not benefit from church programs concerning issues of peer pressure. Perhaps social work could be incorporated in this area to help adolescents deal with peer pressure in the church as well as other areas. Social work could be beneficial in working with churches to establish more support systems for adolescents in the church.

In the data, the respondents had a negative attitude toward discussing personal problems or concerns in the church. They also had a negative attitude toward discussing sex at church. The field of social work may be beneficial in helping churches establish ways of communicating to adolescents. For example, the adolescents felt they could not discuss sex at church. It may not be that the church does not allow sex to be discussed at church, but a method of discussing this issue may not be in place. Issues such as peer pressure and sex among teenagers are issues that are relatively new in the church. Social work may be helpful in addressing the growing needs of adolescents as their problems and concerns are becoming more diverse. The respondents expressed an interest in establishing support groups. Perhaps if adolescents had this form of network, they would find it more comfortable to discuss personal problems in a setting such as a support group.

#### Suggested Research Directions

In doing future research, it would be beneficial to have a larger sample population. A larger sample will provide more data on attitudes youth have toward support systems in their church. Perhaps broadening the sample to other denominations, not limited to African Methodist Episcopal, would provide data on other adolescent attitudes toward support systems.

## APPENDIX I

.



## ATTITUDES OF YOUTH TOWARD YOUTH SERVICES

Directions: The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain attitudes youth have toward services in their churches. Circle the answer that best applies to you. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

### SECTION I. Demographics

1. My age is
  - a. 12-13
  - b. 14-15
  - c. 16-17
  - d. 18-19
2. My gender is
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
3. Who do you live with?
  - a. Both mother and father
  - b. Mother only
  - c. Father only
  - d. Grandparents
  - e. Other/Explain\_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION II. Level of participation

4. How many times did your parent(s)/ guardian(s) attend church services in the last three months?
  - a. Less than 3 times
  - b. 3-6 times
  - c. 7-10 times
  - d. More than 10 times

5. How many times did your parent(s)/guardian(s) attend church-related activities in the last three months?
  - a. Less than 3 times
  - b. 3-6 times
  - c. 7-10 times
  - d. More than 10 times
  
6. How often have you attended church-related activities in the last three months?
  - a. Less than 3 times
  - b. 3-6 times
  - c. 7-10 times
  - d. More than 10 times
  
7. How often have you attended worship services in the last three months?
  - a. Less than 3 times
  - b. 3-6 times
  - c. 7-10 times
  - d. More than 10 times

### SECTION III. Types of programs

8. Does your church have any of the following types of programs for youth? If so, circle all that apply.
  - a. Choir
  - b. Tutoring
  - c. Rap sessions
  - d. Social group/Explain\_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Sports/Explain\_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Support group/Explain\_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Other(s)\_\_\_\_\_
  
9. Of the programs listed in question #8, list the ones you have participated in during the last three months\_\_\_\_\_
   
\_\_\_\_\_
   
\_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION IV. Attitudes toward church and church programs**

The questions below are designed to obtain your opinions about church and programs at your church. Write the number of the response that applies.

- 1 Rarely or none of the time
- 2 Little of the time
- 3 Some of the time
- 4 Good part of the time
- 5 Most of the time

- 10. Programs at my church help me deal with peer pressure. \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Teens who attend church regularly are better able to resist peer pressure. \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. I feel comfortable with discussing personal problems with someone in the church. \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. Church programs confuse me. \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. I feel safe at church. \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. Sadness is a feeling I have at church programs. \_\_\_\_\_
- 16. I wish I did not attend church. \_\_\_\_\_
- 17. My parent(s) and/or guardian(s) insist that I attend church. \_\_\_\_\_
- 18. I can discuss sex at church. \_\_\_\_\_
- 19. The option exists for me to discuss personal concerns at my church. \_\_\_\_\_
- 20. Church activities help teenagers face problems in today's society. \_\_\_\_\_
- 21. I think church programs are terrific. \_\_\_\_\_
- 22. I do not benefit from church programs. \_\_\_\_\_
- 23. I attend church voluntarily. \_\_\_\_\_

24. Church programs help me solve problems.
25. What programs do you like most at your church?
26. What programs do you like least at your church?
27. What programs would you like to add at your church?

Thank you for your participation.

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